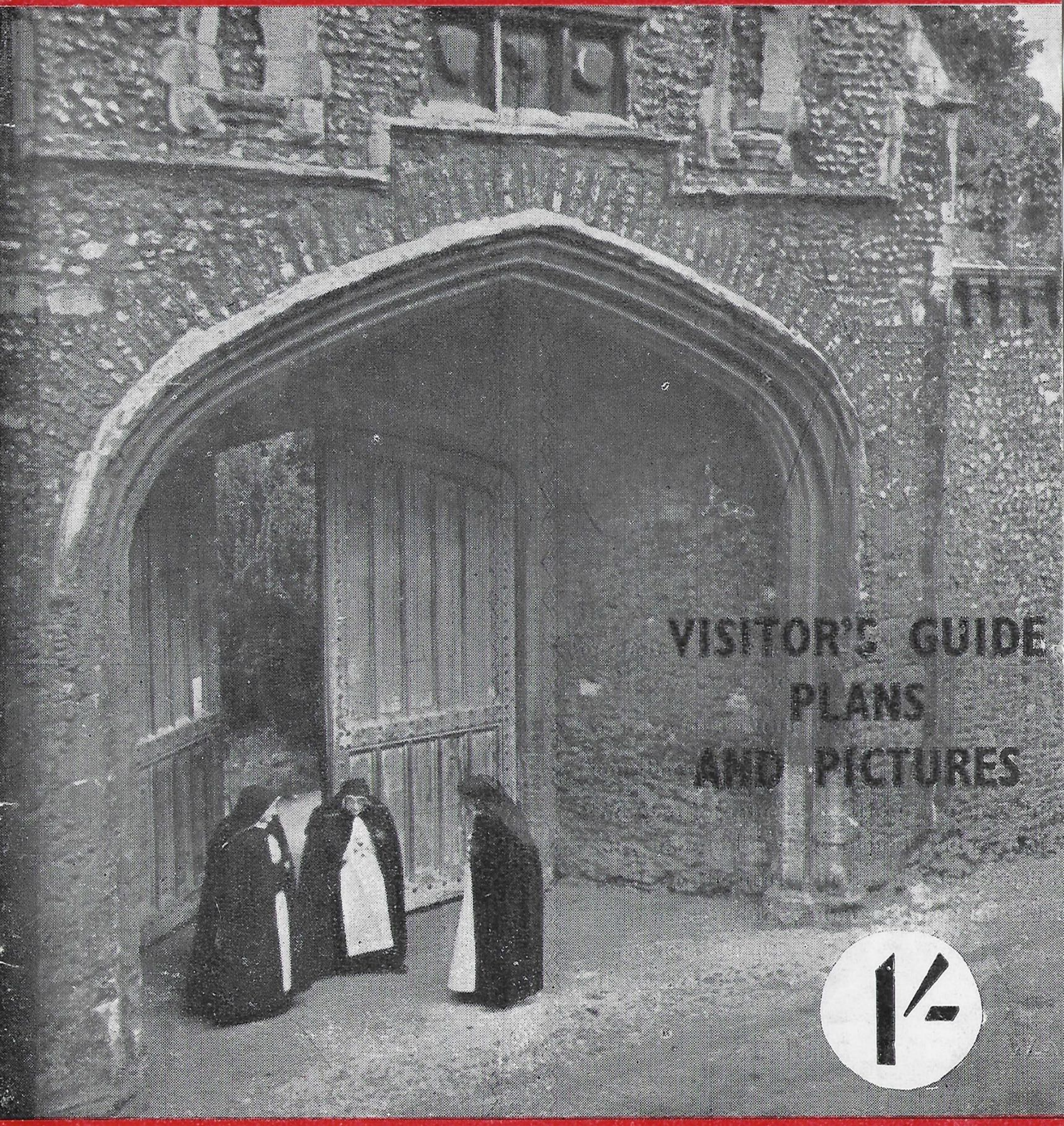
THE STORY OF
WALSINGHAM



VISITOR'S GUIDE
PLANS
AND PICTURES

1/-

THE GREENHOE PRESS WALSINGHAM NORFOLK

The crowned statue of Our Lady now enthroned in the restored National Catholic Shrine in the Slipper Chapel

THE STORY OF

WALSINGHAM

WITH PICTURES, GUIDE AND PLANS

BY

ARTHUR BOND and CLAUDE FISHER

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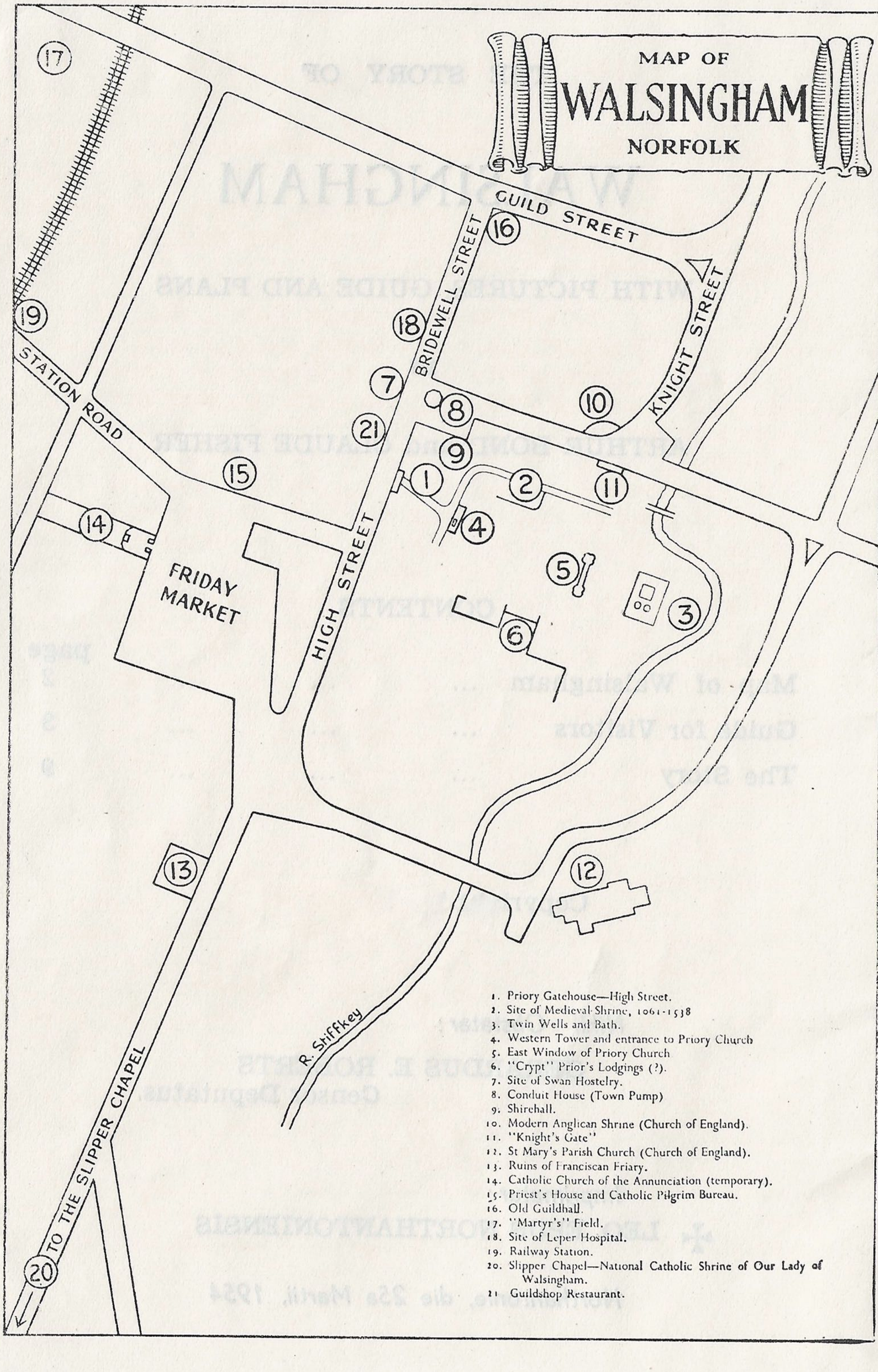
MAP OF WALSINGHAM NORFOLK



1. Priory Gatehouse—High Street.
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GUIDE FOR VISITORS

(Numbers in brackets refer to the map on p. 2)

WALSINGHAM retains to-day more of its ancient places than may at first be supposed. Here is a way from which much can be seen in a very short space of time.

SITE OF ORIGINAL SHRINE [2]

Start at [1] the 15th-century perpendicular gatehouse of the Priory, known to-day as "Walsingham Abbey". On Wednesdays or Bank Holidays admission may be gained for a small charge, on other days by prior arrangement with the estate office.

The gatehouse, foundations of the western tower [4], the great east window [5], the ruined refectory with pulpit and buttery-hatch, the original twin wells and rectangular bath [3], two arches leading from the site of the cloisters, and a small Norman gateway, are almost all that remain to-day. The "crypt", a vaulted chamber [6] within the modern house was possibly part of the prior's lodging.

From the pillar bases of the western tower, looking towards the east window 244 feet away, some idea of the size of the church, 62 feet wide, can be obtained.

The original shrine [2], inside a chapel, stood where the turf to-day is raised, north of the church. See "A" on plan p. 14.

This is believed to be the site described by Erasmus, an eyewitness in 1511, to the east of which, he says, were two wells. William Botoner, an eye-witness in 1479, records the dimensions of both the shrine of the Holy House of Nazareth and the outer chapel which protected it. The outer chapel measured 48 feet by 30 feet, the little wooden holy house 23½ feet by 12 feet 10 inches. During 1854 this outer chapel was excavated and found to coincide exactly with Botoner's measurements.

The late Sir Alfred Clapham, a President of the Society of Antiquaries, on the occasion of the 1949 Summer Conference of the Royal Archaeological Society of Great Britain and Ireland, conducted members on a visit to the Priory ruins Pointing out this site, he said: "There can be no doubt whatever that the famous Lady Chapel containing the wooden

replica of the Holy House of Nazareth stood on the north side attached to the Priory Church as shown on the (excavator's) plan."

During a drought this site, the north wall of the Priory Church with its buttresses, pillar bases of the Choir, Chapter House, etc., appear outlined on the lawn by the withered grass. The twin wells to the east as described by Erasmus in 1511 may be seen to-day amongst the trees beyond the great east window. They are associated with the legend of the shrine from the earliest times—(see story, page 9)—The Norman doorway in the surrounding wall [3] is not in its original position. A Chapel of St. Lawrence stood nearby.

The cloisters, twelve columns of which stood in 1781, were south of the nave. East of these was the chapter house, and to the south the refectory, 84 feet by 28 feet. The south wall of the refectory remains, with its pulpit and buttery-hatch. The north wall and roof stood as late as 1781.

After the dissolution, in 1538, the priory was sold to Thomas Sidney. Later Edward VI (1547-1553) gave the manor of Walsingham to Sir Thomas Gresham, who gave London its original Royal Exchange. The priory descended to Robert, Earl of Leicester, who in 1650 conveyed it to Henry English and others. They, in 1666, when Charles II was king, sold the priory to John Warner, Bishop of Rochester.

He bequeathed it to his sister, Mrs. Lee. Her family assumed the name Lee-Warner. For 255 years the priory was theirs. In 1922 it was acquired by the Gurney family, connected to the Lee-Warners by marriage.

THE CONDUIT HOUSE [8] AND SHIREHALL [9]

Turn right as you leave the gatehouse. On your left, opposite the old conduit house [8], with its cresset top, is the building formerly the Swan hostelry [7].

Turn in the Common Place and on your right is the old shirehall [9], still used for the petty sessions of North Greenhoe, reminder of Walsingham's civic importance. Follow the road to the left of the Bull Inn. Farther down, the old Norwich road ran to the south of the present roadway to

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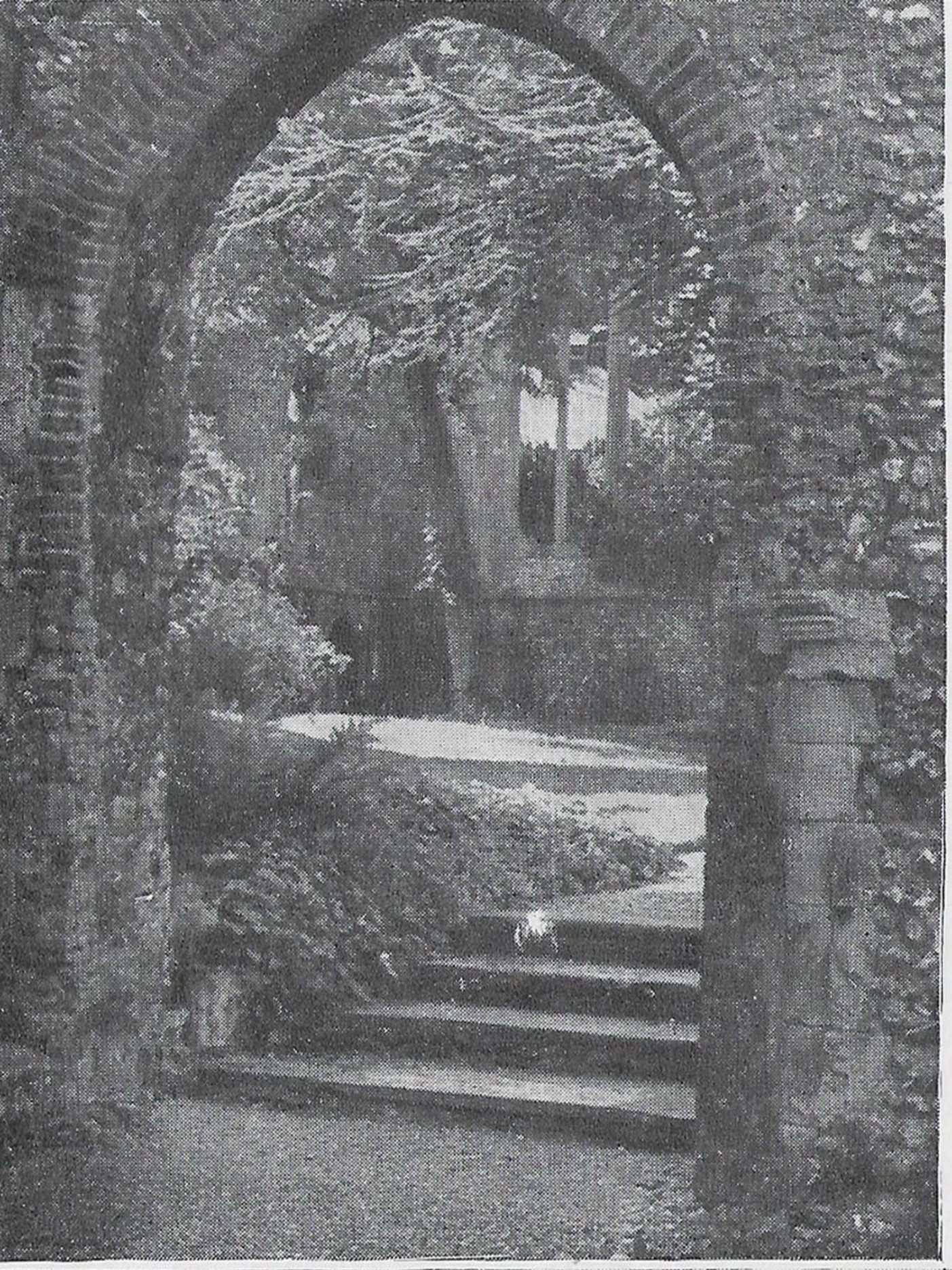
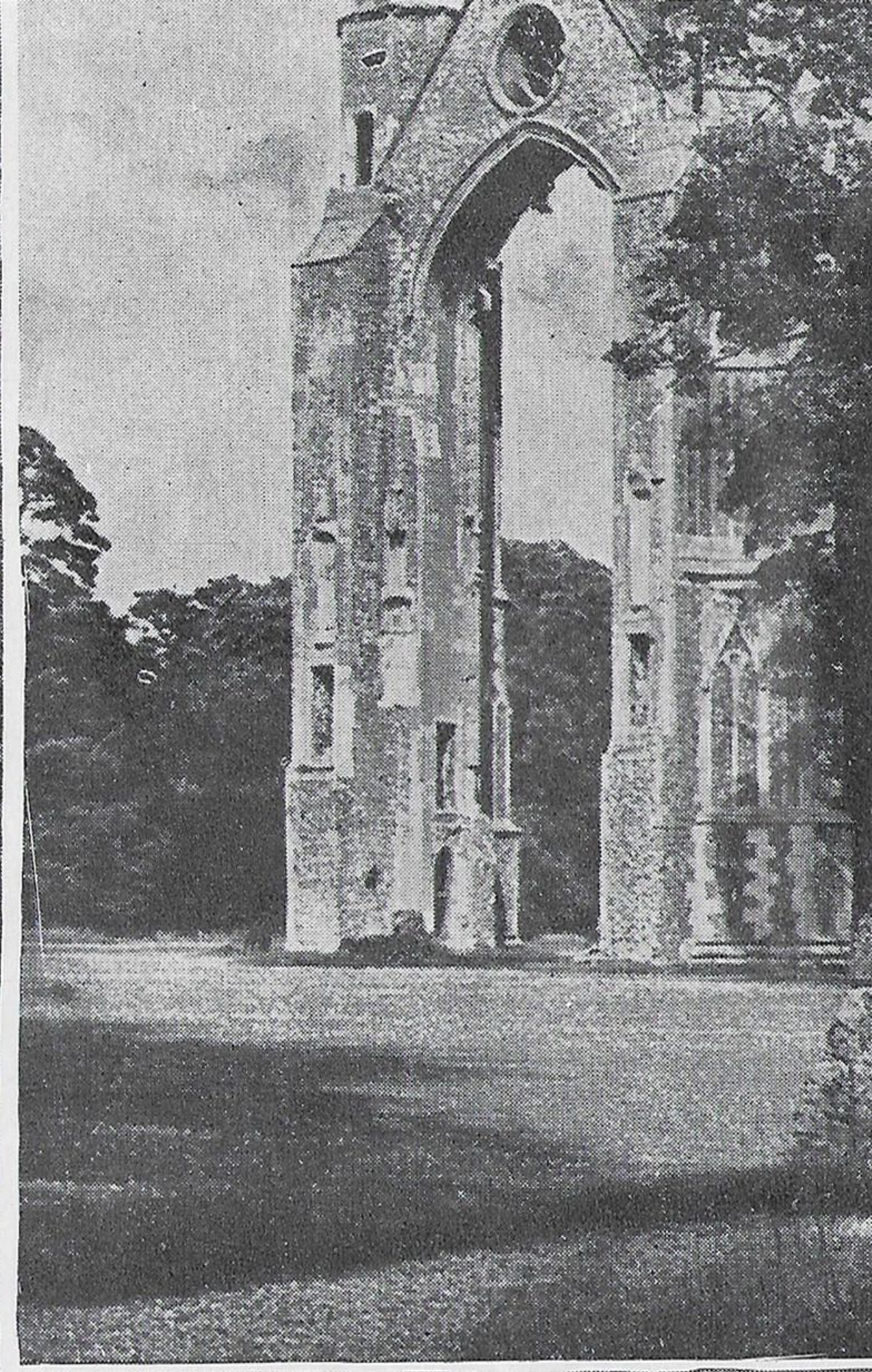
WALSINGHAM PRIORY. (Left) The Canon's Refectory.
(Right) The East Window of the Priory Church.
(Bottom) The Twin Wells and Bath.





a ford spanned by a pack-horse bridge still to be seen within the Abbey grounds.

THE KNIGHT'S GATEWAY [11]

Opposite the modern Anglican pilgrim church [10] an ornate battlement commemorates the knight's gateway [11] where, it is said, Sir Ralph Boutetourt was miraculously received into sanctuary by Our Lady 600 years ago. To the left is Knight Street, but continue across the bridge over the River Stiffkey.

Turn right at the cross roads and you enter the Sunk Road, cutting through the priory grounds. A former owner is reputed to have had this road dug so that passers-by should be invisible from his windows.

ST. MARY'S CHURCH [12]

Near the Church of England parish church of St. Mary [12] you come to the private gates (right) of "Walsingham Abbey", from which you can secure a glimpse of the east window [5] of the priory church.

St. Mary's is a fine perpendicular building of the late 14th and early 15th centuries, with a western tower of earlier date, surmounted by a graceful spire.

Two of the five bells date from 1560, the others 1675 and 1601. Over the exquisite south porch is a chamber.

Note the exceptionally fine 15th-century font, bearing in carved niches the Apostles and Doctors of the Church. Eight angels once supported the bowl on outstretched wings. The bowl carvings depict the seven sacraments and The Crucifixion.

The east window dates from 1871. The southern sanctuary window came possibly from the Friary, seraphs bearing the Five Wounds, recalling St. Francis's stigmata.

The north transept built by Walsingham Trades Guilds contained altars to St. Mary, St. Anne and St. George.

In the north transept chapel, the east window contains

CARDINAL PILGRIMS. (Left) Cardinal Bourne at Walsingham, Angust 1934. (Right) Cardinal Hinsley; Torchlight Procession, Youth Pilgrimage, 1938. (Bottom) Cardinal Griffin in Procession of the Fourteen Crosses, pilgrimage of prayer and penance, 1948.

the arms of the last prior of Walsingham, Vowell, with those of Walsingham, the glass taken from the prior's lodgings.

The alabaster monument in this transept is to Sir Henry Sidney (died 1612, possibly son of the governor of the Leper Hospital [18] who bought the priory at the dissolution), and his wife who gave the font cover.

Going up Church Street, on your right—by the stream—was the prior's mill. Having passed the sites of The George and The Crane and, possibly, The Gryffon and The Bell, other medieval pilgrim inns, you reach the High Street.

FRANCISCAN FRIARY RUINS [13]

A few paces left, on the Walsingham-Fakenham road, the Franciscan Friary ruins [13] are considerable. The site of the high altar was discovered a few years ago adjoining the Methodist chapel. The ruins are open to visitors on Wednesdays and Bank Holidays at a small charge.

The Friary was founded by Elizabeth de Burgh, who, as Countess of Clare in her own right, was descended from Roderick O'Connor, the last high king of Ireland.

The house was founded on February 1, 1347, a licence being granted by Pope Clement VI at the request of Edward III and his queen Philippa, on September 28, 1347. The main road in front of the Friary was probably constructed by the Friars in 1351, when they obtained permission to enclose an existing road which connected directly with the Friday Market Place.

In 1538 the Friary was surrendered to the Bishop of Dover, and by 1541 part of the property was in possession of Sir Roger Townshend, ancestor of the Townshends of Raynham.

PILGRIM INNS AND COOKSHOPS

Returning to the High Street, the house next to The Oxford Stores was once The Dow Inn.

The Black Lion, in the Friday Market, is said to owe its name to the black lion on the pennant of Queen Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III, who, with her husband, stayed there on pilgrimage. The White House and the 15th-century Crownyd Lion are also believed to have stood in the Friday Market.

The Friday Market Place was from the 13th century the scene of a weekly market, while Tuesday Market, equally old,

was held every week. There was a cattle fair at Whitsuntide and pleasure fairs during the feasts of the Nativity of Our Lady and Corpus Christi.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH [14]

Facing east is the temporary Church of the Annunciation, facing south the Priest's house and Catholic Pilgrim Bureau [15].

A market cross stood nearby until 1780. The blind road in the south-west corner probably passed the original Friary entrance.

Returning to the High Street, note the fine Flemish gable facing you, relic of the days of the Flemish weavers.

Turn left up the High Street and you will pass more hostelries and cookshops masquerading under other guises, some refronted and some now returned to their old purpose of catering for the needs of pilgrims.

You are now back again at the gatehouse whence you set out.

GUILDHALL [16] AND "MARTYRS" FIELD [17]

There is a ten-minute walk from the north end of the High Street, leaving the conduit house on your right and going straight ahead.

The first building on your left up the narrow Bridewell Street contains cellars of the 15th-century Leper Hospital and the first Bridewell [18].

Behind this is the old Walsingham goal, a county prison until a few decades ago.

The last house on the right is the old Guildhall. Note its moulded Tudor bricks and fine window frame.

Turn left and pass over the railway crossing. The first meadow on the left is the "Martyrs" Field, where sub-prior Nicholas Mileham and George Gysborough were put to death for supporting the Walsingham inhabitants who gathered with the object of marching to London to appeal to the king against the destruction of their beloved priory.

SLIPPER CHAPEL AND RESTORED SHRINE [20]

The Slipper Chapel, and its national Catholic shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham are just over $1\frac{1}{8}$ miles south. Look

at the signposts and follow the papal diadem and crossed keys of St. Peter. Leave the village by the medieval Friary and, where the roads branch, keep to the right the lower road or Pilgrims' Way by which the river Stiffkey keeps you company. The chapel is on the left and beyond it the meadow with the Stations of the Cross and open air Altar.

Erected in the 14th century, the Slipper Chapel is considered to be one of the finest examples of its style. It is dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria. (See also "Story" page 9 onward.) The sacristy and Chapel of the Holy Ghost, built in 1938, afford extra provision for the thousands of organized pilgrims, visitors and lone pilgrims who yearly come here from all parts.

Between Walsingham and Fakenham, on the right of the main road above the Slipper Chapel going south, stands the Tudor Manor of East Barsham.

GREAT WALSINGHAM

Great (or Old) Walsingham, a mile north of Little (or New) Walsingham and smaller than Little Walsingham, although possibly older, shows traces of three churches, although seven are said to have existed there.

The present Parish Church of St. Peter is well worth a visit. Note the poppy-head pews, 16th-century pulpit, 17th-century altar rails, font cover, old poor box, two superimposed consecration crosses and traces of mural paintings, and the 13th-century window of the north aisle, coincident with the date of the building.

To the N.N.E. of the Church there are traces of All Saints' Church in a meadow.

THE STORY

THE ancient Walsingham Ballad printed about 1496 by Richard Pynson, printer to King Henry VII, records that the Chapel of the Annunciation at Walsingham was built during the reign of the saintly King Edward the Confessor in the year 1061. The story of the Ballad relates how Richeldis, widow, lady of the Manor of Walsingham "in lyving full vertuous," prayed that she might be chosen to undertake some special work to the honour of Our Blessed Lady. In answer to her prayer Our Lady led Richeldis in spirit to Nazareth and there showed her the Holy House of the Annunciation, the house in which the Archangel, Gabriel, announced the Holy Mystery of the Incarnation. Graciously Our Blessed Lady commanded Richeldis carefully to note the length and breadth and to build at Walsingham another in all ways the counterpart where should be commemorated the Annunciation, the first great joy of mankind's redemption.

Three times Our Lady showed this vision of the Holy House to Richeldis and promised that at this new Nazareth in England all who should seek her aid should find there succour and consolation.

Gratefully, Richeldis hastens to do Our Lady's bidding and calling together her most skilled craftsmen she instructs them in the work they are to undertake.

Richeldis received what she believed to be a further sign :

"Howe this our new Nazareth here should stand
Built like the first in the Holy Land."

Wet with dew her meadow glistened in the early morning sunlight except for two squares of equal size left unaccountably dry as though from the heat of the midday sun.

In her enthusiasm, Richeldis herself selects one of the two dry squares, the one which chances to be the closer to her two wells and there she instructs the workmen to set the Chapel which had been begun by Our Lady's aid.

Speedily the carpenters prepare foundations on which to set up the Holy House but carefully as they had followed instructions the second unaccountable thing happens. In no wise will the foundations, so well prepared, correspond with the dimensions of the Holy House and, before their apparent mistake can be rectified, the light fades and night is at hand.

Dismissing her men Richeldis pauses to wonder at the set-back to the work. Slowly she realizes that had she appealed to Our Lady and sought her aid in choosing upon which of the two dry squares the Holy House should be set, perhaps all might by now have been accomplished.

Throughout the hours of darkness, Richeldis earnestly besought Our Lady to aid in finishing the work she had begun, and in answer to that humble prayer Our Blessed Lady with heavenly ministers, herself being chief artificer, erected the Holy House aided by Angel hands; not only erected it but moved it to the site of the second dry square, that is, more than two hundred feet in distance from the place which Richeldis had first chosen.

This is the story of the ballad, the legend of Our Lady's own choice of the spot where the Holy House should stand, the place above all other in England where she wished to be sought by all in need of her aid.

"And syth here Our Lady hath shewed many miracle
Innumerable now here for to express
To such as visit this her habitacle.

* * * *

O glorious Lady
Our asking not repell
In mercy all women ever thou doth excell
There for Blessed Lady grant thou thy great grace
To all that thee devoutly visit in this place."

So much for legend. The Medieval Register of Charters of the Priory of Walsingham, preserved in the British Museum, deals in facts. The first Charter to be recorded is as follows:

To all, etc. Geoffrey de Faveraches, etc. Be it known to you that I have given and granted to Edwin, my Clerk, for the institution of a religious order which he will provide, and for the health of my soul and the souls of my parents and friends, in perpetual alms, the Chapel which my mother founded at Walsingham in honour of the Ever Virgin Mary, together with the possession of the Church of All Hallows, in the same vill, with all its appurtenances, etc.

This Charter is not dated and although some have doubted the early date of the foundation of the Chapel by Richeldis, as given by the Ballad, more recent research suggests the year 1061 to be not improbable.

Subsequently, in another Charter, Gilbert, Earl of Clare, confirms to his Clerics of Walsingham, Ralph and Geoffrey, for the health of his soul and the souls of his parents, in perpetual alms, the Chapel which Richeldis, the mother of Geoffrey de Faveraches, had founded.

By 1281 the Shrine was sufficiently important for King Edward I to come on pilgrimage in thanksgiving for an escape from death which he attributed to a miracle wrought by the favour of Our Blessed Lady of Walsingham and in 1296 at Candlemas—"le jour de la chandeleur"—during the King's second visit the Shrine provided the setting "en la chapelle de notre Dame à Walsingham" for the signing of an instrument of Alliance between him and the Earl of Flanders.

To this shrine there came between 1061 and 1538, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from all parts of Europe. They included Edwards I, II, III and IV, Henrys III, VI and VIII, Richards I, II, Queens Eleanor of Castille, Isabella of France, Philippa of Hainault, Johanna, widow of Henry IV, Katherine of Aragon, King David and Robert Bruce of Scotland.

The Black Augustinian Canons who built their Priory alongside had charge of the Shrine which was continually enriched by gifts and grants until it became one of the most famous of Christendom's Shrines of Our Lady.

The road to Walsingham, now become one of England's main highways, was marked by Pilgrim Chapels and Pilgrim Hostels, The Milky Way was renamed the Walsingham Way, pointing across the heavens the route to England's Nazareth in the Holy Land of Walsingham.

The young Henry VIII, it is said, walked the last mile from Barsham Manor House barefooted and presented a jewelled necklace of great value to Our Lady. His first visit as King was made in 1511 and in June of the same year it is recorded that the windows of the outer Chapel, which by this time had been built to afford protection to the Holy House, were being glazed at the King's expense.

In the King's book of payments is recorded a yearly payment of 200s. made for the King's priest singing before Our Lady at Walsingham and for the King's Candle constantly burning there 46s. 8d.

But in September, 1538, there is a final entry recording :

"For the King's Candle before Our Lady of Walsingham, and to the Prior there for his salary, NIL."

Already on September 18, 1534, the Prior and Canons of Walsingham had signed the Act of the King's Supremacy—the first religious house in England to submit. Norfolk men at Walsingham itself protested with their blood against the fall of religious houses "where God was well served and many good deeds of charity done," but in the June of 1538 Our Lady of Walsingham was dragged away to London to her burning, which it is said took place at Chelsea in September before Cromwell the Lord Privy Seal.

On August 4, 1538, all the Priory property was handed over to the King's Commissioners. The little Holy House was torn down, the Priory Church stripped of its lead and furniture, the windows, doors, stone called freestone, glass, iron, slates, and tiles were disposed of in lots for a total of £55 15s. 11d.

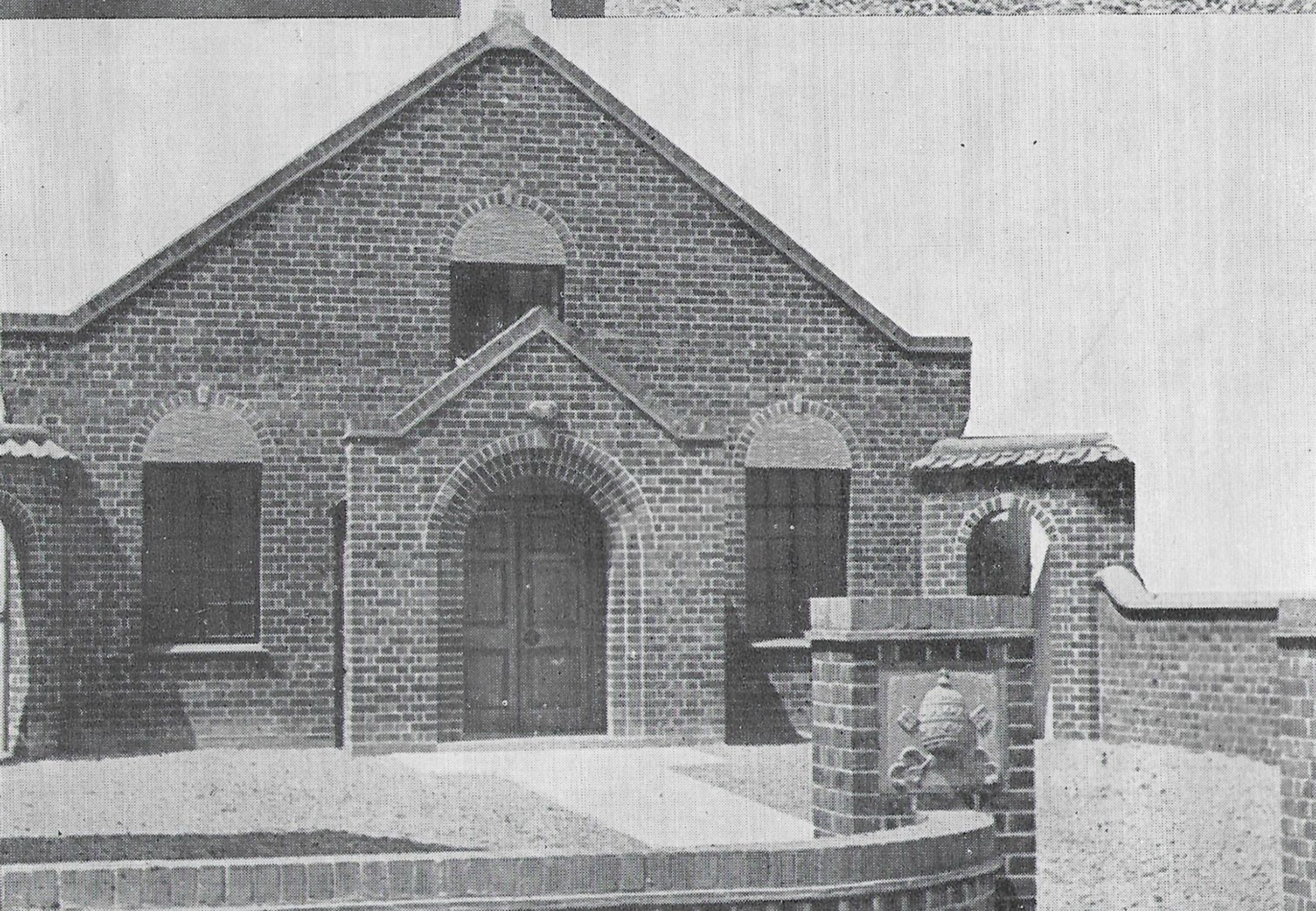
But even with the physical destruction of the Shrine, there were those who still held the name of Walsingham in honour, and the destroyers found it necessary to send Sir Roger Townshend there to trace the originator of the report that Our Lady still granted favours at her old shrine. In the January of 1539 a poor woman of Wells was committed to the ward of the constables of Walsingham and at Townshend's instructions was on Market Day paraded round the town in a cart with a paper set about her head written with the words "A reporter of false tales," young people and boys casting snowballs at her. This done she was set in the stocks "till the market ended." His report ends with the following significant remark, "Howbeit I cannot but perceive that the said image is not yet out of some of their heads."

* * * *

During the last decade of the 19th century a pious Anglican lady, by name Miss Charlotte Boyd, was driving through the lanes of Norfolk in search of a possible home for some Anglican Sisters when she came upon a small 14th-century Chapel on the outskirts of Walsingham which owed its preservation to the many uses to which it had been put—

14th-CENTURY SLIPPER CHAPEL, containing national Catholic Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

THE SLIPPER CHAPEL MEADOW. Bishop Parker erects the Fourteen Crosses as a Permanent via crucis, July 17, 1948.



at one time it served as cottages, another as blacksmith's forge and finally as shelter for the local farmer's turnip cutting. Miss Boyd was much taken with the beauty of the West front which was largely intact, and on making enquiries discovered it was the last of the Chapels on the pilgrim route, traditionally known as "The Slipper Chapel" and dedicated to St. Catherine, at which pilgrims were thought to have removed their shoes to walk the last mile barefoot to the Shrine at Walsingham. Miss Boyd was determined to obtain possession and at once entered into negotiation with the owners for its purchase.

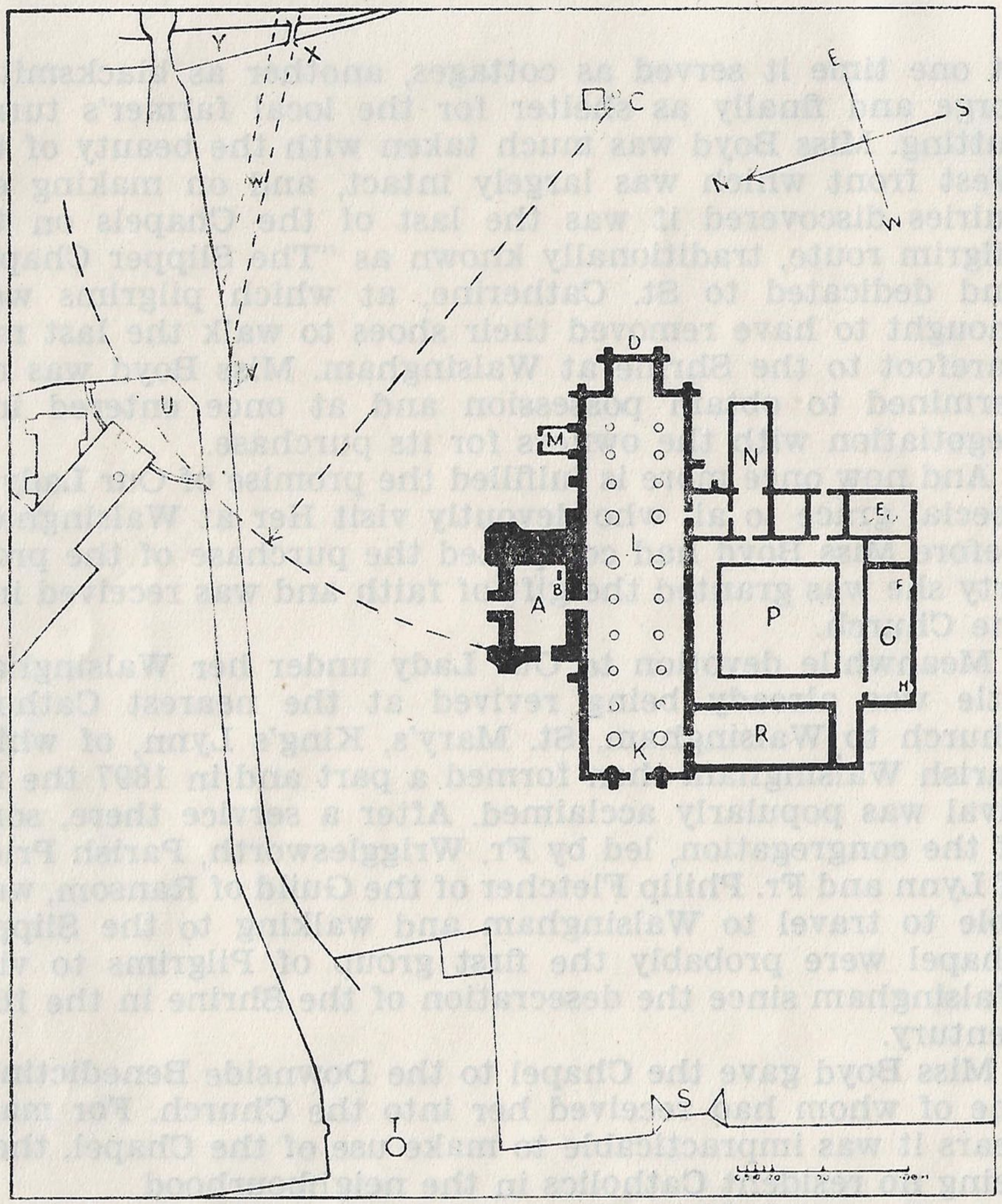
And now once more is fulfilled the promise of Our Lady of special grace to all who devoutly visit Her at Walsingham. Before Miss Boyd had completed the purchase of the property she was granted the gift of faith and was received into the Church.

Meanwhile devotion to Our Lady under her Walsingham title was already being revived at the nearest Catholic Church to Walsingham, St. Mary's, King's Lynn, of which parish Walsingham then formed a part and in 1897 the revival was popularly acclaimed. After a service there, some of the congregation, led by Fr. Wrigglesworth, Parish Priest of Lynn and Fr. Philip Fletcher of the Guild of Ransom, were able to travel to Walsingham and walking to the Slipper Chapel were probably the first group of Pilgrims to visit Walsingham since the desecration of the Shrine in the 16th century.

Miss Boyd gave the Chapel to the Downside Benedictines, one of whom had received her into the Church. For many years it was impracticable to make use of the Chapel, there being no resident Catholics in the neighbourhood.

As the revived devotion spread Shrines of Our Lady of Walsingham were erected in other churches. On August 19, 1934—400 years after the national apostasy—Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, with Bishop Youens of Northampton and many of the Hierarchy of England and Wales led a great pilgrimage of reparation of over 12,000 pilgrims back to Walsingham to the restored Shrine in the Slipper Chapel.

TEMPORARY CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION Friday Market, (Left) the Altar (Right) Bishop Parker receiving silver key at the opening, July 2, 1950. (Bottom) Exterior view.



WALSINGHAM AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY

(A) Lady Chapel and site of original Shrine
(B) Stone Coffin discovered 1854
(C) Twin Wells and Bath
(D) East Window of Priory Church
(E) Warming Room (?)
(F) Reading Pulpit
(G) Refectory
(H) Buttery-Hatch
(K) Tower at West Entrance to Priory Church
(L) Central Tower
(M) Porch
(N) Chapter House
(P) Cloisters
(R) Guest House
(S) Gate House
(T) Town Pump and Common Place
(U) Forecourt to Anglican Shrine
(V) Battlement commemorating Knight's Gate
(W) Old Norwich Road
(X) Ford and Packhorse Bridge
(Y) River Stiffkey

Cardinal Hinsley of Westminster led a great national Youth Pilgrimage on July 2, 1938, during which he laid a sheaf of Our Lady's own lilies on the site of the desecrated Shrine which in 1538, four hundred years before, had been levelled to the ground. By 1938, four years after the national shrine had been restored Catholic pilgrims to the Slipper Chapel were estimated to number over 50,000 a year. During the war years Walsingham was within the 5 mile coastal belt banned to visitors and in consequence the majority of pilgrims were those members of the forces to whom the ban did not apply. Members of the American Forces were accorded an exceptional privilege when by courtesy of the owners they were enabled on May 17, 1945, to arrange for High Mass in the presence of the Bishop of Northampton, offered at an Altar set up on the site of the old high Altar, before the gaunt ruins of the East window of the Priory Church. This is believed to be the first occasion that the Holy Sacrifice has been offered there in 400 years.

Cardinal Griffin, following the precedent of his last two predecessors, led a great pilgrimage of Prayer and Penance in 1948 when 14 groups of men each carried a 9-ft. oak cross 200 miles to Walsingham. On the last night of their journey they kept vigil throughout the hours of darkness before their crosses set up on the outskirts of Walsingham, making their way to the Slipper Chapel in the early hours next day when Masses were offered at temporary altars almost continuously from before dawn until the last Mass sung by the Bishop of Northampton. Members of the Union of Catholic Mothers making their annual pilgrimage, lined the route of the procession to the ruins of the ancient priory in the afternoon, when Benediction was given from a temporary altar to over 12,000 pilgrims. The following day the crosses were erected in the Slipper Chapel Meadow as a permanent Via Crucis.

Amongst those present on the occasion was a group of Frenchmen who brought with them a copy of the famous Statue of Our Lady of Boulonge.

The Slipper Chapel Shrine, said Mgr. Leo Parker, Bishop of Northampton, speaking at King's Lynn, in 1947, will "also please God be a temporary Shrine until the day shall come when the devotion of our English people, with the aid of Catholics of the world, may make possible a large and worthy fane, to repair the ruin of the old and to eclipse even that raised by the great faith of our ancestors."

Meanwhile, on July 2, 1950, a temporary Church in honour of the Annunciation was formally opened at Walsingham by the Bishop to serve pilgrims until that day of which his Lordship spoke when the many pilgrimages of reparation shall bear fruit and England makes restitution by rebuilding and restoring to Our Lady her Holy House of the Annunciation.

On August 16, 1953, Bishop Parker blessed a new East Window in the Slipper Chapel depicting in glowing colours the Glorious Assumption of Our Lady, in commemoration of the formal definition of the Dogma.

Perhaps the greatest day ever witnessed at Walsingham was the Feast of the Assumption (15th August 1954) when the Apostolic Delegate in the name of the Holy Father (in the words of Bishop Parker) "restored to the brow of our National Madonna the Crown filched from Her by Henry VIII."

This magnificent Marian Year ceremony was acclaimed by more than 15,000 pilgrims standing amidst the ruins of the ancient Priory.

"Nations from afar shall esteem thy land as holy.
And blessed shall they be that shall build thee up."
TOBIAS CHAP. XIII.

THE

WALSINGHAM CATHOLIC PILGRIM BUREAU

President
THE LORD BISHOP OF NORTHAMPTON

Council Chairman
THE PARISH PRIEST

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